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Introduction

There is a futures-oriented research project on Global Innovation Journalism (GINJO) to be carried out in 2009-2011. Innovation journalism is about journalism of innovations, but also about innovations in journalism. Here you are invited to follow one of the foresight exercises carried out within the project. The one described here as a narrative is a Delphi study in 2009 on the future of journalism.

Motivation and key problem driving the foresight exercise

Journalism as a field and as business is in heavy turmoil. Besides financial crisis and economic constraints, rapid technological, social and institutional changes affect the field in ever deeper cycles. At the same time there is need for a plausible business model and for reflections on the challenges and the changing modes of journalism. Professional journalism is in transition ? one solution to explore the future images of journalism was to probe possible futures of prosumerism in journalism. We saw prosumerism as one of the key drivers for change in this field. Another major issue was the changing shares and roles of the printed press and digital media.

Objectives

We wanted to get futures images of journalism and argumented comments as well as views of such images with a view to the impact of advancing prosumerism and social media.

Prosumerism

- means the growing fusion of production with consumption
- term coined by Alvin Toffler (Third Wave 1980)

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- he envisioned a future where users conjoin to create products to meet their demands
- now a strengthening trend with radical impacts on media industry
- accelerated by digitalisation and experience society
- 1st sense: fusion of production and consumption (Don Tapscott ?prosumption? 1995)
- 2nd sense: mixed roles ? professional + consumer; consumer/provider, peer provider, peer-support specialist
- 3rd sense: combination: non-corporate-producer + consumer (DIY, voluntary simplicity, Indymedia)

Prosumer = A consumer who adopts an active role in the design of the products he or she purchases, or who purchases component elements of products in order to build or administer his or her own goods and services or an amateur who takes an enthusiastic interest in technologically advanced products that are intended chiefly for professionals.

Oxford English Dictionary

Prosumerism also means the following elements:

- proactive process ? consumer steps in at an early stage
- tailor-made ? own needs better fulfilled
- enthusiasm ? empowerment

One of the aims of this foresight exercise was to analyse how the social media are shifting the balance in mainstream media. We define social media as follows:

Social media means tools, spaces and modus operandi for people interacting with each other, creating, sharing, exchanging and commenting contents in virtual communities and networks.

There are several possible implications from social media on the journalistic practices in the future.

Implementation of a Delphi study

The whole research project has a team of more than ten researchers (in three universities). This Delphi study was primarily designed and carried out by two researchers ? project researcher Ms. Sofi Salonen and myself Sirkka Heinonen from Finland Futures Research Centre (FFRC), University of Turku. The whole project and thus this foresight exercise as well was funded by TEKES (The Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation). The costs were approximately 4 person months. The whole exercise was conducted in three months in spring 2009.

Methods and participants

The Delphi method was used as the main method for this foresight exercise. The cluster analysis was used in processing the results. Due to the strict timetable and scarce work resources allocated to this exercise the Delphi was constructed as in two-round mode, even though the orthodox mode is to use three rounds. We wanted to have participants with different background, not just from within the media field itself, but also some futurists were invited. The participants represented the following categories:

- Nationwide newspaper (N=2, women 2)
- Alternative newspapers (N=3, women 2)
- Magazines (N=2, 1 woman)

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- Regional newspapers (N=2)
- Media researchers (N=4, women 2)
- Television (N=1)
- Blogger (N=2)
- Futurist (N=2, women 2)

We approached the participants by emails and in some cases by phone as well. It is always a crucial step in Delphi to get wide enough representation and on the other hand to get replies and rich argumentation. In gathering the panellists, we used the 'snowball' approach - we invited some directly and asked for suggestions and recommendations for other panellists. We wanted the panel to represent both sexes and a natural age division, which affected the recruitment to some degree. Getting panellists was very difficult because of the special field of the study and the complicated nature of the question asked. That said, we are happy with the results.

The rounds were constructed as follows:

- The First round: results were used to formation of four different images of the future
- The Second round: results describing the desirability of the images, producing steps for backcasting scenarios

The 1st round questions

Both qualitative and quantitative questions were categorized under six general themes:

- 1) personal image of the future (of the respondent),
- 2) production and consumption of media contents,
- 3) interdependencies,
- 4) technology, and
- 5) values

Analysis

The qualitative analysis of the responses was aided by performing a cluster analysis on the quantitative data.

The 2nd round questions

The panelists were asked to select 1) Preferred image of the future; 2) Most probable future, and 3) Most dystopic image of the future. Then, they were asked to modify their favorite image of the future to form their preferred or optimal state of professional journalism in the year 2020. Thirdly, the panelists were asked to envision five events / things that needed to happen for this particular future to have come to be.

Outcome of this foresight exercise

The following four scenarios/futures images were produced, their core elements being presented below.

Scenario I: Truth is merely a tool

- Blogs, social media and other means of journalism outside the traditional media form the core of

information transfer.

- Professional journalists deliver information found in networks to their paying customers.
- The task of journalism remains the same: to deliver objective information on what is going on in the world.

Scenario II: Printing press returns

- The traditional professional information transfer has experienced a new boom after a lengthy period of recession.
- The change towards digital environments has significantly increased the interaction between journalists and their audiences. The line between the subject matter of amateur journalists and the work of professionals is rather thin.
- Journalism reports what is going on in the world in a critical, balanced and equal way, and aims to direct the audiences' attention towards issues important to all humanity.

Scenario III: People versus a league of specialists

- The building of communities and the maintaining of a national viewpoint in the global operational environment are considered important tasks of the national level of media that also emphasizes regionality and locality.
- Alongside newspapers, the role of Internet and social media as sources of information and entertainment has remained important.
- Journalism is considered the watchdog for those in power, and such watchdog journalism aims to bring forth a multitude of viewpoints, which can then be assessed and analyzed as fairly as possible.

Scenario IV: New Atlantis

- Spontaneous action, the rise in the importance of one's own social contacts and communities, the search for meaningfulness, and the creation and sharing of subject matter related to one's own interests are the cultural drivers of change in the 2010s.
- Journalists are the maintainers of systems of collective intelligence.
- The ethos of journalism is to understand the logic behind the knowledge creation that takes place in new networks, and to offer the citizens better access to the best possible information.

The scenarios were constructed from the panellists' views. This was rather problematic, since no real exceptional or bold argumentation was used or hugely interesting new paths of development envisioned. Scenario II 'Return of the printing press' was considered as the most favored scenario. How can this be a surprise? Were the media professionals simply clinging to the 'glorious' past? Because the panel represented mostly other people than actual representatives of media houses, we do not see that the result is really about 'clinging to the past'. Besides, it was not such a surprise that the 'Return of the Printing Press' scenario was the most favorable for the panellist, but it was surprising that it was considered the most probable one, too.

Best experience and greatest benefit?

Each foresight exercise gives a learning opportunity for those implementing it. It is very useful to use that

experience for further methodological improvements. The main aim was to be able to outline the scenarios and their evaluations on the basis of Delphi results. However, another equally important benefit is the utilization and elaboration of the results in further work, workshops, and project work.

What would we do differently?

We would like to have more time in planning the questions for the panellists and perhaps running more test runs. We did it, but only with a few persons. We would like to use some further incentives for the participants to be actively engaged and motivated to reply in greater length. This time we offered an opportunity to participate in one of our workshops (organised at a later date), which some of the participants actually seemed to appreciate.